



# Got Septic?

## MULTIPLE RESIDENCES / COMMERCIAL PROJECTS

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) answered by Environmental Health Services (DEHS) – Waste Water section

**1. What is a septic system?**

- According to the Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC) “when a public sewer is not available, a building may be connected to a private sewage disposal system” or “septic system.”
- A septic system is comprised of a septic tank and a soil absorption system.

**2. What types of septic systems are reviewed by San Bernardino County?**

- There are two types of standard soil absorption systems: seepage pits and leach lines.
- County only reviews septic systems collecting human generated waste. Any industrial waste disposal must be reviewed by the local California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB).

**3. Why do people use different types of septic systems? (pros and cons of each)**

- Seepage pits are vertical and generally take up less surface area on a lot. Often, in the presence of a clay layer, seepage pits are used. They can also be paved over but are often more costly to construct. The construction of seepage pits is not allowed in the mountains.
- Leach lines are horizontal trenches. They stay within a shallow enough depth to treat the wastewater in a more effective way that is aided by evaporation and transpiration.

**4. How do I know if I'm on septic or sewer?**

- Local sewerage entities are most often city agencies. They are likely to know the location of their sewer in relation to your lot, as well as connection information.

**5. Where is my septic system?**

- DEHS does not know where your septic system is located. Please call a local plumber to locate your system.

**6. How close do I have to be to sewer to be required to connect?**

- In most areas of the county, the UPC and the California Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCB) require you to connect to the sewer system if you are within 200 feet (+ 100 feet per lot or residence after the first).

**7. Who do I call if I'm having problems with my septic system?**

- Please call a plumber.

**8. How do I know what size septic tank I need?**

- For commercial projects, that depends on the fixture unit count or daily usage estimated for your project. Please refer to the UPC.

**9. What is the minimum lot size required for a septic system?**

- Most of the West Valley is requested by the Santa Ana RWQCB to have a maximum of a 20 fixture unit count per ½ acre or not exceed a daily waste water flow of 300 gallons per ½ acre. This depends on the type of usage for the business (refer to the UPC).
- Most of the High Desert is requested by the Lahonton RWQCB to not exceed a daily waste water flow of 250 gallons per ½ acre. This depends on the type of usage for the business (refer to the UPC).
- Most of the Low Desert (Morongo Valley and eastwards) must not exceed a daily waste water flow of 5000 gallons or 5 residential units. This depends on the type of usage for the business (refer to the UPC).

**10. What happens if I don't meet these requirements?**

- Your options are to go to the appropriate RWQCB to ask for an exemption, connect to sewer or consider installing a septic system with secondary treatment in order to reduce your total absorption area.

**11. How do I get approval for a new septic system?**

- Submit a percolation report and plot plans to DEHS for review and approval.
- Obtain permits through city or San Bernardino County Building and Safety.

**12. Are there any review fees?**

- Yes. Fees are based on project type. Please inquire for more information.

**13. What is a “perc rate”?**

- In general, it is a number resulting from a scientific process performed by a professional. It tells how suitable the soil is in supporting a septic system. This information helps to design your septic system according to the specific conditions onsite.

**14. How do I know if my lot has a perc rate or not?**

- Provide EHS with an Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) to search for a perc rate, if one is available.

**15. When is a "percolation test" needed?**

- In all subdivision of land, even if a local perc rate is available.
- For new septic systems in mountain areas.
- For new commercial or industrial projects.
- Where existing data will not allow DEHS to set a design rate.
- In the presence of challenging factors such as steep slope, shallow depth to groundwater, nearby stream, etc.

**16. Who does a percolation test?**

- Mostly California Registered Engineers or geologists working for an environmental consultant.

**17. How far does a septic system have to be from:**

Property line adjoining private property:

- A minimum of 5 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines; 8 feet from seepage pits

Water Well:

- A minimum of 100 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines; 150 feet from seepage pits.

Ephemeral stream / Drainage course:

- A minimum of 50 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines or seepage pits.

Perennial stream / USGS Blue line stream:

- A minimum of 100 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines or seepage pits.

Please inquire for more minimum setbacks, especially for subdivisions in the Valley and High Desert.

**18. How much distance is needed between multiple leach lines (LL) or multiple seepage pits?**

- For LL trenches 3 feet wide by 3 feet below the inlet: minimum 8 feet from trench edge to trench edge.
- For LL trenches 3 feet wide by 2 feet below the inlet: minimum 6 feet from trench edge to trench edge.
- For LL trenches 3 feet wide by 1 feet below the inlet: minimum 4 feet from trench edge to trench edge.
- For seepage pits: minimum 12 feet from pit edge to pit edge.

**19. What is DEHS looking for on a "plot plan"?**

- In general, a plot plan submitted to DEHS for review should show the property line, a footprint of the house or building, and the dimensions and location of the septic system. Note the number of bedrooms or number of fixture units. Make sure all the minimum setbacks are met. Show contours and scale.

Please inquire for more detailed checklist.

**20. Who draws the plot plan?**

- Usually engineers, architects, surveyors or some septic system installers.

**21. "I'm subdividing 5 acres into 5 1-acre lots, but there is a building on the parcel now. Do I have to perc for that lot too?"**

- In general, no, but you do have to get the septic system of that existing building certified.
- Since this is a subdivision of land in which the buildings will use a septic system, a percolation test will be required.
- Remember, no matter how many buildings you have on one lot, you must comply with the appropriate RWQCB's daily discharge requirements.

**22. "How do I get my septic system certified?"**

- Pick up a form for Private Sewage Disposal System Certification from DEHS and have a professional (as listed at the top of the form) certify your system.

**23. "I want to expand my movie theater that seats 100 people to seat 500 people. I'm not adding any fixture units and I have a 750-gallon septic tank. Can I use that same tank?"**

- According to the UPC, the estimated daily flow for a theater is 5 gallons per seat. For 500 people the daily flow is 2500 gallons. The 750-gallon tank would not accommodate the addition of seats. The septic tank is 1.5 times the flow. If flow is under 1500 gallons/day (or 0.75 times the flow) plus an additional 1125 gallons. For the daily flow of 2500 gallons, a minimum 3000 gallon tank would be needed.



County of San Bernardino • Department of Public Health  
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Water • Wastewater • Land Use**

385 N. Arrowhead Ave.  
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0160  
(909) 387-4666 • FAX (909) 387-4323

[www.sbcounty.gov/dehs](http://www.sbcounty.gov/dehs)